

DEAR WATERS – FOCUS ON THE URBAN RIVER IN SZEGED AND TURKU

*"Oh, I love this river so much! It may be because it is Hungarian from head to foot;
she was born in our homeland and dies here too.
And she crosses the great plain, my cherish plain."
(Petöfi 1847)*

THE WATER PEOPLE

On a warm and sunny summer day a group of people from Szeged throng around the Well of Anna.¹ Some are drinking directly from a fountain that looks like a covered drinking automat and some have taken along with them plastic water bottles or canisters. The passing visitor considers the water somewhat unsavoury. The renovated fountain is a sort of shrine or at least a sort of oasis in the dusty everyday life of the city. This is not just a question of quenching a thirst, because the water is known to also have many therapeutic effects both as a drink and when used for bathing. Actually, a nearby spa offers a wider-ranging opportunity to benefit from the same water. Many other fountains have crowds swarming around them: beside the font in front of the museum children are playing, across the bridge the city folk are attracted to the swimming pool and in the centre of the city young people are congregating beside the fountains between the blocks of steps in the park. There are a few anglers on the bank of the river and small boats navigate nimbly towards the upper reaches. What appear to be light green "algae" cover the water near the shores of the scenic river.

It is actually the river itself that is the most attractive of the water elements in the city. The River Tisza flows through the city and also regulates its annual rhythm in many ways. A little to the north of the city centre, the River Maros has given to its riverbed its own particular colour and strength. It has always been a question of being both a route and a boundary, a leisure retreat and a direct and indirect source of livelihood: a question of being one of the city's most important brands, because the city of peppers, sun, students and salami would not be the same without its historical waterways. During the winter the river of this summer city is noticeably calmer. Even the bathing ships have been transferred to the docks to spend the winter.

Turku is also a city by a river, but also a city by the seashore, although in the wider sense Finland is primarily known as the land of thousands lakes. Many Finns assert that they are only at home where there are lakes, although there are also many who declare that they need to smell of the salt of the sea in their everyday lives. The expression 'river people' is not heard often (cf. the Swedish name for Turku, Åbo,

¹ See panorama:

<http://www.360cities.net/image/anna-medicinal-water-well-night-szeged-hungary>.

which means dwellers from the river bank),² even though everywhere rivers have been the routes along which the forerunners, industrial builders, merchants and scholars have travelled towards the interior. The River Aura is a waterway dating from prehistoric times and the place of origin of trading centres, and where the sacred places (the Koroinen ancient site and the cathedral) and the city birth phenomenon have been connected by the role of the river. In the present day the sea, swimming baths, port and a number of fountains have made the people of Turku water people. Ships to Sweden, the docks, archipelago, ship restaurants and a river leading into the interior provide a livelihood, a venue for events, business and culture. Individualised and specialised river experiences in Turku can be by rowing from the centre of the city in a hired canoe as far the municipalities upstream, casting a salmon-fly at Halinen or even skiing along the iced-over river on a cold winter's day to the weir at the self-same Halinen. In a decent frosty winter a skating route to the city centre downstream is cleared for the use of city inhabitants and sometimes a lane in the ice is kept open for swimmers.

Quite a number of major European cities are renowned, not only for their history, but particularly as riverside cities: Rome, Prague, Budapest, London, etc. These cities are often presented with the assistance of beautiful views and descriptions of the river and bridges. The purpose of this article is to shed light on the significance of the urban river for Turku and Szeged, to present some findings of research and to try to find possible ethnological methods of approach to the river environments under study. There are several reasons for the two cities I have used for comparison purposes and the potential research environments. In the first place, a few years ago we developed and launched, together with the River Aura Foundation, the idea of logically endeavouring to advance the humanist and, especially, ethnological study of the cultures of our own river area in Turku and the municipalities upstream. This means that in addition to reports on riverbed life, planning strategy and marine biology reports, we discuss and write about the everyday life of the people and the river in the past, at the present and in the future. In turn, this means recording work, theses, publication and public exhibitions, as well as visualising diverse paths of research and the future.³

A little later I also had the opportunity of acquainting myself with the River Tisza as it flows through Szeged and with the city's culture on its banks. This was especially the case with the SemEthnoSz in 2007, organised by Professor Barna's department. On that occasion I participated in a water theme fieldwork event in the vicinity of the city of Szeged together with two of my students. Later I also paid a visit to the banks of the Tisza on my own. At the same time we were carrying out

² Kostet 2008; According to Unto Salo, emeritus professor in Archaeology (1995, 11.), the name Åbo speaks of the early extensive trading activities in the river valley. The Old Swedish form for river "aa" and the form "bo(e)" meaning dwelling and dweller may have been involved, too. Furthermore, "bod" meaning granary has been mentioned in this connection.

³ The first publication: Salenius-Virtanen-Komulainen 2004 discussed watermills in the River Aura Valley. An exhibition based on this material has toured the municipalities in the area. The latest work "Remembering the River" (Joel muisti) ed. Virtanen & al. 2009, is now in the make-up stage. A touring exhibition of this material has also been made. Further, a number of ethnological master's theses about the river have also appeared, e.g. Kostet 2009; Nummi 2008; Nyyssönen 2008.

research in Turku with our European colleagues on industrial traditions in the river setting. The most recent river contact concerns Turku's application for the Europe's Capital of Culture 2011 programme. The research and teaching project we have been developing together with the Department of History of the University of Turku, "Related and Experienced. What Kind of Turku Will People Remember?" has been accepted for implementation with the financial backing of the Turku 2011 Foundation for 2010–2012.⁴ The central feature of the implementation is the River Aura. This means, for example, fieldwork courses for students, seminars and publications. It is also our purpose to construct, through the collection of recalled information and for presentation, a mobile "history room" in city premises and, specifically, on the river bank.

RIVER ETHNOLOGY

"River ethnology" is actually a relatively little studied and approached subject or research method. For the point of view of the Finnish national culture, for example, the forest, field, lake and sea seem much more familiar. In the Finnish research tradition, as far as rivers are concerned it has been more a question of, above all, fishing along the wider channels, log floating and saw mill and ware mill activity.⁵ In a historical ethnological and material context it has been easy to approach the river, with its small water mills, historical fishing weirs and types of river sailing craft. Only when cultural ecological research brings with it concerns over the pollution caused by industry and agriculture or water regulation, does it become a matter for ethnology.⁶ The relationship between the river and man, the significance of even a smaller water route for the needs of everyday life, places experienced and reminiscences related to this, have received less attention. Very often in Finnish ethnology it is generally also a question of the "rural river". The shackled urban river with planned settlement surrounding it is a difficult target and actor for ethnological research, because in addition to its historical significance as a city, as it has nowadays, it has often had, to bear outright the "burdens of development" of the city image or the new urban culture as well as the agents of a productised culture. It is often a question of being an actual arena in which events take place. The music festival "Down by the Laituri" organised in the city centre, the Baltic Herring Market, the fish soup festival on the banks of the Tisza in the middle of Szeged⁷ or the speed boat competition speaks on this behalf. From an ethnological viewpoint it is no longer just a question of boat type or the museological saving or classifying of fishing tackle, but also determining how the river "unfolds" as it mingles with the daily affairs of life or, for example, the process of interpreting changes in the cultural landscape and administration using the methods applied in studying cultures. At the same time the river is a collection of places recalled, and its role can be approached with the help of the methods and equipment of ethnological research.

⁴ Joojoo 2009. 2.1

⁵ Talve 1997. 82–88. cf. also notes.

⁶ *Inter alia* Ruotsala 1992.

⁷ <http://www.360cities.net/business/fish-festival-szeged-hungary>

A novel (borderland)viewpoint in our river research was forthcoming from research carried out at Pello in the River Tornio Valley in 2000, for which our target was the practice of smuggling over the northern national frontier (Finland – Sweden), called *joppaaminen*. In a number of instances we have been able to connect the river theme to multidisciplinary international projects. One of these, which was related to river and water system research, was the “Industrial Heritage between Land and Sea” project (Patrimoine Industriel entre terre et mer, pour réseau européen d’ecomuseums), at the final meeting of which in Venice I had the privilege of speaking about the significance of Turku and the River Aura from the standpoint of local industrial heritage and the ecomuseum concept.⁸ One of the most extensive of the recent projects concerning the River Aura and Turku has been the pan-European “I fiumi come infrastrutture culturali”, in which several European rivers have been included.⁹

In Hungarian ethnology the river has often been associated with the prerequisites for (agricultural) growing and the birth of different farming areas and customs. From the perspective of Szeged the articles on ecological adaptation by Tibor Bellon and László Mód highlight in a manifold way the relationship between the river and livelihood. Especially from the perspective of the Tisza Valley is Bellon able to differentiate several river environments, which at the same time emphasise a fundamental difference compared to our own river culture, namely, the important meaning of flooding. Regulation and draining systems,¹⁰ extensive flooding and the destruction of the city tell of a different scale compared to the Finnish river milieu.¹¹ It is apparent that the Hungarian river has been the subject of much research, but seldom has it been linked to the everyday urban existence and particularly to Szeged (except for research on flooding). In the case of Szeged, remodelled ethnological urban research may find in the setting and everyday activity of the river an excellent target and partner for research. Even during the fieldwork course held at Professor Barna’s department there were several theses in the course of preparation that were, either directly or indirectly, related in one way or another to the significance of the local river. That has also been our aim in Turku.

TISZA VS. THE RIVER AURA

The targets for our research journey are Tisza and Szeged as well as the River Aura and Turku. In both cases the river is the focal element in the centre of the city, the subject and object of the citizen’s urban life. River parole certainly varies in different towns, but many things also unify: bridges in a physical sense, discussion of the quality and height of the water, local river landmarks, special festivities, catastrophes, summer cottages on the shores, recreation use, etc.

⁸ See Industrial Heritage between Land and Sea; www.koinetwork.org.

⁹ I fiumi 2005. This a study in cultural landscape, at least as far as the section on the River Aura is concerned.

¹⁰ “The Regulation of the Tisza River carried out in the second half of 19th century was one of the biggest landscape transformations in Europe and fundamentally changed the ecological conditions of the Great Plain”. Mód 2004. 83.

¹¹ Bellon 2004; Mód 2004. See also References to Bellon, e.g. Andrásfalvy 1975.

The *joppaus* theme I mentioned earlier (River Tornio) makes the use and meaning of the river boundary particularly visible/transparent. The international frontier acts as an economic regulator. The situation of the river as a natural and physical boundary marker is clearly apparent in the history of the city of Szeged, too. It functioned as the gateway to the Turkish Empire and later separated the commercial town of Újszeged from the old town itself. After liberation from the Turks, the settlement lying on the right bank of the Tisza became a market town (1796). Following the Great Flood Szeged was united with Újszeged (1880).¹² The river also divides Turku into two clear parts, the old and the new. “Tälpual jokkee” (this side of the river—old Turku dialect) and “Toispualjokkee” (other side of the river—new settlement) are well established in Turku, although to outsiders sometimes rather tricky place names). The historical centre of Turku with its churches and municipal buildings were built on the same side of the river bank, whereas the newer shopping centre along with the market place is on the other side of the river. In a sense the River Aura is still the “main street” of the city. Turku has been described as aristocratic, but the river, democratic.

In Szeged the river is an environmental element, the nature of which people have during the past tried to influence. As far as the Tisza is concerned above all it is a question of the fluctuating height of the water and shipping routes. This has created different types of farming landscapes along the course of the river, and also decidedly affected even the architecture of dwellings on the banks or the quality and construction type of sailing vessels by the shore. The meandering riverbed has changed its course, while at the same time it has regularly been subjected to flooding. Despite miscellaneous efforts to discharge the water and construct basins no solution to the waterline problem has been forthcoming and the whole city of Szeged has had to subject itself to the machinations of the water.

Poison catastrophes have also put the delicate ecosystems under pressure, of which the most significant has been the cyanide emissions from the Romanian goldmine accident in 2000. On this occasion the outdoor basins for the separation process at the Australian-owned mine failed and the pollutants spread into the water system. After that catastrophe the river was described as dead, but over the last ten years improvements have taken place. Nevertheless, the effects on the environment have reached and continue to reach extensively, for example, into the everyday lives of those living in the vicinity of Szeged, and equally impinge on the image of the River Tisza. Hundreds of fisher folk in the Tisza area lost their means of living, angling was discontinued and even the river banks fell into disfavour as a recreational area.

The River Aura was an important connection even in early prehistoric times from “Finland Proper into the interior of the country. The possibility of sailing on the river diminished as the land level rose. Industry and production plants began weir fishing in fast-moving water channels. At an early stage the River Aura at Turku became, even without a goldmine, the town’s “main sewer” and it was only at the end of the 1900s that different treatment plants and sewage solutions as well as upstream agricultural protection zones have made the river fit for swimming again, at least upstream from the centre of the city. Nowadays there is a number of floating restaurants

¹² Nagy-Péter 2004. 105.

(e.g. Lulu, Svarte Rudolf, Cindy).¹³ The sailing boats of tourists can be found at the guest harbour and a few charter vessels that connect with the archipelago find shelter at the bend in the river. On the other hand hotel-sized Silja and Viking ships to Sweden dock at the harbour at the mouth of the river. The river with the area around its banks is the centre of activity especially during the summer.

The badly polluted Tisza certainly did not, at the beginning of the 2000s, tempt swimmers, although the traditional floating swimming pools have held their own on the river right up to the present time. Róbert Horling's book about Szeged opens with a view of the river in which a covered raft-like swimming pool (úszóház) moored to the bank takes up the central place. The picture actually also has another focal point, the old bridge (régi Tisza-híd). In its presentation of the river the same work relies on a more nostalgic view in which a number of punts have been gathered in the shade of a tree on the shore.¹⁴ The same model is still widely employed in the river area in the centre. The same type of punt is familiar on the River Aura in Turku both in photographs and in stories. During my own fieldwork in 2006–2008 I did not, however, succeed in discovering even one such river vessel, even though just two or three decades ago they had a prominent place on the River Aura in fishing, in milk transportation as well as taking children to school from time to time. It took me a long time to find anything like swimming rafts, although at least in old photographs they can evidently be found.¹⁵

Just a few years back the sandy shores of the Tisza provided the inhabitants of the city with good places to swim, even in the centre. Furthermore, floating swimming vessels (úszóház), as referred to above, were built in the city area to serve on the river. This was a raft-like covered construction which originally included a swimming pool as well. Nowadays such pools are no longer in use and the rafts are only used as sunbathers' clubs usually equipped with restaurant services as well as changing rooms. In many cases it would seem that the facilities are not open to the general public. Some of the boats are a sort of limited company whose members pay annual subscription fee for use of the facilities. Thus, restaurant and retail outlet prices are quite reasonable. During the fieldwork in 2007 we collected information on three swimming vessels. "Kata", "Piros" and "Szabadság" are all located on the banks of the old city side of the Szeged and operate according to the same basic rules. Both the boats and their names originated in Soviet times. The patrons are rather elderly and in addition to sunbathing it seems that cards and dominos is a popular way to pass the time. According to certain sources, the patrons have become grouped in keeping with their professions. Doctors come together with their own group and, correspondingly, lawyers with their own. Raft membership also carries with it the possibility of mooring a small boat and, for example, provides space for canoes, so that many families also use the swimming raft as a base for boating. Because the Tisza is unfit for swimming in the city area, many customers continue on upstream to go swimming and fishing. One

¹³ See Kostet 2008. The first floating restaurant Le Pirate arrived on the bank of the river in 2001. In 2008 there were 11 floating restaurants moored to the banks of which 3 served the whole year round.

¹⁴ Horling 1993.

¹⁵ Lahtinen 2005. There is a swimming pool raft on the left-hand side in the cover picture for the study.

of those interviewed said that the family had owned a share (a cabinet) for over forty years. This investment has stayed in the family from one generation to the next.¹⁶

The River Aura study in Turku I referred to earlier began with the collecting, exhibiting and publishing of material on river mills (Salenius – Virtanen – Komulainen 2003). Later we developed a more extensive project with the help of which we were able to interview inhabitants of the upper course riverside in order to gather information about their relationship to the river over the previous decades. For the project “Memories of the River Aura” about fifty inhabitants along the riverside were interviewed. Through these personal narratives we obtained information on, for instance, the relationship between the river, agricultural growing and animal husbandry, fishing and hunting, and also about floods and aesthetic meaning. Water from the river was used in the summer for irrigation purposes, although during the winter, too, the river provided a source of water. A basically cattle dominated river valley has a need of abundant ice in the spring, summer and autumn for cooling milk and storage purposes. Water was sawn out of the river and hauled onto private farms where it was kept under a sawdust covering for the spring and summer. This necessity required skilled assistance the introduction of special machinery for hoisting. Likewise, the narratives concern the close relationship to nature that was formed around small animals used while hunting fowl and fishing. For example, before the time of the crayfish pest, crayfishing was a very significant source of income for many households. Detailed descriptions of fishing trips and implements are ethnographically rich recordings. Correspondingly, fishing made it possible to diversify the family diet, particularly in economically adverse times (such as war). Narratives of the departure of the ice and ensuing flooding may not be on the scale of the River Tisza, but small local catastrophes, such as localised oil spills, have not been forgotten.

The River Aura Valley has been officially designated a nationally valuable landscape.¹⁷ From the point of view of cultural landscape and architecture several inventories and reports have been made concerning the River Aura Valley, but from the ethnological standpoint the industrial heritage in particular in still largely uncharted (cf. changing utilisation of city centre industrial property). This work in fact commenced in 2008 when the fieldwork group I was conducting recorded memorised information in the old dairy at Pöytyä. It is also a question a project concerning the life cycle concept of production plants by the riverside, because in later times the same space has been occupied by, for example, a cannery, a carpenter’s shop, a laundry and a bakery. In there future it is hoped to concentrate research on a sawmill that has had a long history and a tannery. Further, a few ethno-archaeological objects (e.g. the ruins of a mill) are tempting. As far as the building stock is concerned some sporadic abandoned beach saunas should also be mentioned, which are formally “worthless” and out of reach of the official inventory and documentation process, are under threat of demolition.

¹⁶ Fieldwork material and notes as well as participant observation. SemEthnoSz fieldwork course Szeged, 2007.

¹⁷ The National Council of Finland has, as a result of a national survey made under the guidance of Ministry of Environment, named the Valley of River Aura as a nationally valuable landscape. The confirmed valuable landscape measures 10,000 hectares and is much larger than any other nationally nominated landscape. Saaristo 2005. 45.

I have approached the river theme with the help of two exemplifying localities. The cities in question are twin cities and so cooperation in the field of culture has also become quite diverse. In some years a musical event has been organised in Turku called “*Aurajoki virtaa*” (the River Aura is flowing), which has attracted performing artists and vendors of handicraft goods to the banks of the Aura, even from Szeged. Correspondingly, people from Turku have been offered selling spots at the Szeged Bridge Market. The river is the heart of both cities and also deserves the attention of joint research both as an urban visual phenomenon and from the point of view of the everyday activities and experience of the individual citizen.

For research the river has become revealed from the perspective of natural science, according to the river’s own properties, strengths and, unfortunately, even catastrophes. The effects of the Tisza cyanide incident still extend to the use of the river both economically and with respect to recreational activities. Active treatment of the water, protective zones for agricultural land based on EU regulations and improvement of the sewage system of the murky River Aura have brought a new kind of river to the centre of Turku whose floating restaurants entice customers, the fast-flowing sections of which attract anglers and on the verges of which musical and other events are held. At the same time the changes in everyday life that this activity has brought have generated humanistic study of the river and its relationship to the community, river parole and, for example, places recalled from the past. Ethnological research has many tasks ahead in this sector. The river can also be understood from the perspective of sustainable development, as a resource for creative industry and as Turku’s image linchpin for the future. A “river seminar” has been planned for the Turku 2011 project, in which it is hoped to also compare the River Tisza and above all the city centre river culture of Szeged to corresponding cases.

One clear research strategy is related to means of livelihood and industrialisation. A long line of natural sources of livelihood in river areas, based on cultivation, which has become a specialised manufacturing riverside industry, has become adjusted to a situation in which space emptied of the factory chimneys puffing out smoke, are seeking novel uses.¹⁸ This policy has already been adopted in Turku, because the factory space in the centre is an important resource from the city planning point of view.¹⁹ The recording of the entire heritage in the upper course is, nevertheless, still in its infancy. The fieldwork course mentioned earlier at the old Pöytyä dairy opened up new vistas for the study of the relationship between industry and the river. In some cases the time-domains certainly set limits on later use, and the study of later constructions on the site of a medieval mill can, from the ethno-archaeological perspective, turn out to be more of a study of architecture than research on alternative use of the mill.

Correspondingly, in Szeged factory properties can be found by the riverside (cf. old photos) whose future can be examined according to the same possibilities.

¹⁸ Good examples by the river in the centre of Turku are the Wärtsilä dock sheds (Conservatory and Academy of Science), the Manilla rope factory (now a cultural centre), the old tile factory (student residence) and the Barker textile factory (now an indoor sport centre).

¹⁹ Industrial Heritage between Land and Sea.

Here, as far as the buildings are concerned, attention is, nevertheless, initially paid to a group of buildings that are situated a little further upstream than the centre. There is a location on the banks of the Tisza in Szeged that is ethnologically extremely interesting, which actually does not have a counterpart on the shores of the Aura, namely, a village of summer cottages called Sárka (Üdülő Társulat). This location primarily represents the city culture of 1960–1990 and is undoubtedly, at least in this form, reaching the end of its life cycle, but nevertheless from the researcher's point of view interesting and it could even be said, urgent. The need for a larger careful inventory along with documentation as well as research interviewing the inhabitants here is beyond question. The tightly built "holiday village" consists of almost three hundred allotments with one or, occasionally, two buildings. There are a couple of decent fish restaurants and a jetty for small boats which "open up" the area to occasional visitors also. All of these activities reflect a village community atmosphere, neighbourly help and the appropriate envy.

The architecture of the area is conspicuously unique, because almost all of the cottages are two-storied in such a way that the annual floods do not damage the living space in normal circumstances. The waterline can be easily seen on the walls of many houses. Most of the buildings are nowadays caught in a spiral of dilapidation. Especially are those cottages owned by different firms and associations deserted, although on the other hand many private owners have repaired their own cottages. The needs of the dwellers, for example a local infrastructure (water, sewage, roads), are served by a residents' association which has its own staff and office. In the course of fieldwork it became possible to record a documentary file found in the association's loft (contracts, maps, receipts, minutes), and this must be considered valuable material for interpreting the different phases in the area as a whole. Furthermore, most of the cottages were photographed, even if more detailed photographic documentation, such as of the interiors, is still waiting to be done. The area offers an excellent opportunity to concentrate on, for example Sárka alone, to choose multidisciplinary (international) instruction and especially to engage in fieldwork courses. In addition to ethnologists, art historians, anthropologists, folklorists and architects, also for example students of photography could participate or even students who are acquainted with the restoration of dwelling houses. This is a potential object of protection. With the help of an object of this type forms of action aimed at sustainable development of the city can be successfully approached. Local success does not vanish, but does change.

Floating restaurants of the type I mentioned on the River Aura are not found at all on the Tisza, but the swimming rafts referred to earlier (úszóház) are a special phenomenon in their own right that clearly represent the former river and city culture. Both among the owners of the cottages and shareholders (renters) of the swimming raft it would be possible to conduct a survey before beginning the interviews. The populations of both target groups are from the perspective of the operationalising of the fieldwork (survey) of a suitable size and availability can be arranged. A material acquisition process of this kind and productising of the river culture can admirably serve not only academic research but also the local educational institutions in Turku and Szeged viewed from the so-called ecomuseum concept perspective. The examination and interpretation of one's own immediate surroundings, the evaluation of cul-

tural influences and also the monitoring of change on material culture can in both cases be clear objectives. These matters will perhaps be discussed as early as at the River Culture seminar in Turku in 2010 or 2011.

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